
Conrad's Critique of Imperialism in Heart of Darkness

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Conrad's Critique of Imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*

TODAY MANY students of history, as well as of literature, read the novel Joseph Conrad set in the Congo of 1890. In our era of decolonization, they are interested because the story is one of fiction's strongest statements about imperialism. Of course, the novel has other important themes, both psychological and metaphysical. But the theme of imperialism is obvious and central. Conrad himself stressed it in a letter to his publisher, William Blackwood: "The title I am thinking of is *The Heart of Darkness* but the narrative is not gloomy. The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time distinctly."¹ This declaration seems quite simple, but it is not. The aim of this essay is to examine Conrad's extremely complex, and as yet inadequately understood, critique of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*.

Most literary critics, not specifically interested in the political side of the story, have assumed in passing that it is anti-imperialist, then have gone on to analyze other aspects of the narrative. Those critics who have paid particular attention to Conrad's position on imperialism, however, have found that it is far from clear. In fact, the four main critics have arrived at widely divergent interpretations of three passages that are crucial to an understanding of Conrad's attitude.

The first passage is the frame narrator's eulogy of the "knights-errant" who sailed down the Thames bearing "a spark from the sacred fire" together with "the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empire."² The other two passages, also near the beginning of the story, are even more significant because they are spoken by Marlow, Conrad's favorite narrator, who might be supposed to represent the author. While looking at a map of Africa, Marlow remarks, "There

was a vast amount of red—good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there" (p. 10). He implicitly contrasts these British colonies with others, particularly the purple German colony of Tanganyika and the yellow Congo Free State. Previously Marlow made a similar contrast between modern British imperialism and that of the ancient Romans:

What saves us [the British] is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps [the Romans] were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. . . . The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to. . . . (pp. 6–7)

Here, as in his synopsis for his publisher, Conrad seems to oppose only wasteful and selfish imperialism. He appears to justify British imperialism on grounds that it is "efficient" and conducted according to some unspecified "idea."

The problem of interpreting Conrad's commitment in these passages is difficult, and the various readings thus far offered by critics reveal as much about their own assumptions as about Conrad's. Jonah Raskin, minister of education of the Yippies, has expressed what is supposed to be a New Left point of view in *The Mythology of Imperialism* (1971). This book con-

cludes that both Conrad and his narrator Marlow were so changed by their experience of the Congo that they turned against imperialism not only there but everywhere. The pro-British passages quoted above Raskin explains away as gestures to Conrad's audience: "Marlow talks about sacred flames, the flag, the indomitable British spirit. It's Korzeniowski the Pole aping the British, insinuating himself into British culture, trying to disguise that foreign look, that Eastern European accent." Underneath this toadyism, however, Conrad supposedly attacked British imperialism. Raskin goes on to say of Marlow: "But he is also an explorer, a middleman with contacts at the end of the road. His tale is like one of Mao's big character posters—it initiates a cultural revolution."³

In *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1963) a second critic, Eloise Knapp Hay, discovers a difference between Conrad and Marlow. Like Raskin, she thinks Conrad opposed all imperial powers. She sees Marlow, however, as a "punctilious, well-meaning British conservative" who "sanctifies Britain's efficient imperialism."⁴ Thus she believes Marlow speaks sincerely in the critical passages on "efficiency" and the "idea," but she strives to show that Conrad undercuts these values in the course of the story. At the end

we are left to meditate on what he [Marlow] has failed to see: that England's efficiency and ideas will not save her from the half-shaped resolve in Africa which will hardly distinguish one white man from another when Africa's moment comes. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz, Marlow said. It seems the major burden of the story to reveal what Marlow failed to see—that England is in no way exempt.⁵

The fear of black revenge, of course, belongs to the era of the critic rather than to the story of 1899, which did not anticipate the arrival of "Africa's moment," but the general position is still plausible: Conrad may have condemned British imperialism on grounds quite distinct from Marlow's terms of approbation.

Yet another critic has decided that Conrad himself (not just Marlow) approved a certain form of imperialism. Avrom Fleishman in *Conrad's Politics* (1967) feels that Conrad did not

accept Marlow's justification of imperialism in terms of "good work" but did agree that it might be redeemed by an "idea." After quoting the passage on the Romans given above, Fleishman says, "The distinction in this passage between 'colonists' and 'conquerors' can be applied throughout Conrad's tales and explains much about his varying judgments of imperialist ventures in his own time."⁶ Supposedly Conrad condemned "exploitative conquerors" like Almayer in *Almayer's Folly*, Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* but approved of "colonists" like Tom Lingard in his trilogy and Jim in *Lord Jim*. The difference between a "conqueror" and a "colonist" is that the latter follows the "idea." Looking at Conrad's works besides *Heart of Darkness*, Fleishman interprets the "idea" that distinguishes the colonist as "commitment to the role, to the place, and to the men among whom he lives. This commitment constitutes an act of allegiance equivalent to the service of a state. It is an identification of oneself as a member of the native society, which becomes the colonist's community in his escape from the home country" (pp. 98–99). We should note immediately that Fleishman does not find this idea applied in *Heart of Darkness*. All the imperialists in the story are "conquerors" rather than "colonists."

The final critic of the four is remarkable because he himself is proimperialist. Robert F. Lee in *Conrad's Colonialism* (1969) offers personal anecdotes from ten years in the Orient to illustrate a host of frankly racist contentions. He quotes the *Heart of Darkness* passage on the Romans to support his general argument that "One of the major directions of Conrad's colonial fiction is a recognition of and an accord with the conception of Anglo-Saxon superiority in administering the lives of Oriental and other dependent peoples."⁷ This argument is advanced with such crudity that it may easily be dismissed. Wilfred Stone is quite right in calling the book "a misreading of Conrad so gross as to be, at times, simply ludicrous."⁸ Still, the book serves to alert us to the kind of misinterpretation that Conrad's complex text can evoke.

Despite their widely varied points of view, these four critics have a failing in common: none takes sufficient account of the material difference between the Congo and other col-

onies. Because we use the single word "imperialism," we tend to think that the phenomenon was essentially the same in all areas, varying only according to such subjective factors as the culture and the benevolence of the mother country. Actually, imperialism was not monolithic. Important discriminations should be made in terms of imperial aims, systems of administration, degrees of exploitation, and even types of exploitation. These differences were influenced by particular material circumstances in both the colonies and the mother countries. Since imperialism was not identical in all territories, Conrad's harsh evaluation of the Congo need not imply any final judgment, either favorable or unfavorable, of British imperialism.

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad selected two explicit criteria—efficiency and the "idea"—to judge imperialism. On the basis of both external and internal evidence we can show that the author himself did not ultimately espouse these values. Nonetheless, he chose them because they were widely held in England at the time and were well suited to condemning the type of imperialism practiced in the Congo. Conrad was not necessarily trying to ingratiate himself with the British, to "disguise that foreign look." Rather, in the political aspect of the story, he was making an appeal to the values of his audience so that they might censure the atrocities in the Congo, a colony materially different from Britain's territories. In the subtext of *Heart of Darkness* Conrad suggests a further judgment against British imperialism itself, but this judgment is made according to entirely different criteria and remains implicit.

The value of efficiency was promoted in the late nineteenth century by social Darwinism, which believed that only the "fittest" could and should survive. The first social Darwinists, including Herbert Spencer, were not proimperialist, because they saw the struggle as taking place between individuals rather than between races. In 1894, however, Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution* introduced "external social Darwinism," which justified imperialism because it was for "this quality of social efficiency that nations and peoples are being continually, and for the most part unconsciously, pitted against each other in the complex rivalry of life."⁹ The next year

Rudyard Kipling, laureate of empire, wrote "The 'Eathen," which put the point more colloquially:

The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows down to wood an' stone;
'E don't obey no orders unless they is 'is own;
'E keeps 'is side-arms awful: 'e leaves 'em all about,
An' then comes up the Regiment an' pokes the 'eathen out.

By the end of the decade, talk of efficiency was rampant. The Liberals under Lord Rosebery adopted the twin slogans "Sane Imperialism" and "National Efficiency." The Fabians, who were proimperialist as well as socialist, indicated their adherence to the value when they named their famous dining club "The Coefficients." It is against this background of general affirmation, then, that we should read Marlow's declaration "What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency."

The value represented by the "idea" is more difficult to determine because Conrad never defines it. If, unlike Fleishman, we remain within this single Conrad text, we must conclude that Marlow is referring, not to "identification of oneself as a member of the native society," but rather to what he means when he talks about ideas elsewhere in the story. Marlow is initially attracted to Kurtz because the man "had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort" (p. 31). The jealous brickmaker calls him "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else" (p. 25). Kurtz had begun as an idealist, and in his report he had quite sincerely proclaimed "we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (p. 51). The "idea" espoused by Kurtz that Marlow seems to admire, then, is not joining the natives but rather improving them. Readers of *Heart of Darkness* in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899 would have readily understood this meaning of the "idea." The notion of the "civilizing mission" was already well established, and in that year Kipling provided it with a catchy title in his poem urging the United States to take over the Philippines—"The White Man's Burden."

While Conrad himself may not have approved of either efficiency or the "idea," he knew these popular values could be used to condemn the

Congo, which was unique among colonies. The exact nature of the African colonies and the motives behind their conquest have been matters of heated debate ever since Europe partitioned the continent during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. In 1902 John Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* advanced the economic interpretation that industrialized Europe needed colonies as sources of raw materials, as markets, and, most important, as places to invest surplus capital that could no longer find high profits in the saturated home countries. In 1916 V. I. Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* extended Hobson's argument. Whereas Hobson believed that stagnant surplus resulted from an accidental malfunctioning of the capitalist system, Lenin contended that European economies had entered a new stage, moving from competitive to monopoly capitalism. This new stage inevitably produced surplus requiring export. Monopoly capitalism was synonymous with imperialism.

A series of historians have since contested the Hobson-Lenin thesis, pointing out that there was little economic interchange between Europe and Africa in the years immediately following partition, and have suggested as an alternative a political motivation for colonization.¹⁰ Bismarck wanted colonies in order to solidify national sentiment in Germany; England wanted colonies to protect the Suez and Cape routes to the old empire in India; and all European powers wanted colonies for bargaining chips in their struggles among themselves. Most recently, several economically minded historians, both Marxist and non-Marxist, have reacted against this purely political interpretation. Eric Stokes has pointed out that Lenin did not insist on any immediate economic involvement by the imperial powers. Their economic interest may have been anticipatory and preemptive.¹¹ D. C. M. Platt has demonstrated that during partition top British officials were openly concerned lest France and Germany establish colonies excluding British trade.¹² A. G. Hopkins has shown that resident European merchants urged a forward policy in West Africa after palm-oil prices became depressed in the 1870s and African suppliers resisted schemes to modernize production.¹³ Finally, Richard D. Wolff, by breaking

down aggregate trade statistics, has suggested that for certain European manufacturers even a small market increase may have been crucial in the era of partition.¹⁴

The debate over the global causes of imperialism will surely continue, but it seems plausible that for some territories the demands of politicians predominated; for others, those of manufacturers or merchants; for still others, those of financiers. Each circumstance would give rise to a different type of colony. We should note, however, that even colonies acquired for purely political reasons were eventually influenced by economics. Unwilling to pay for running colonies, European governments sought to develop them at least to self-sufficiency. Every type of colony mentioned above required an initial period of grants-in-aid from the mother country to establish basic structures of civil administration, transportation, and communication. We can thus see how the Congo was distinct from all other colonies. Whereas other colonies were backed by the full resources of a European state, the Congo was the possession of a single man. "Basically," Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage have noted, "it was because he could not provide the capital outlay represented by the period of grants-in-aid in more conventional colonies that King Leopold's personal rule in the Congo sank to such appalling depths of maladministration."¹⁵

King Leopold II of Belgium acquired the Congo as his own country (rather than as a Belgian colony) through shrewd diplomatic maneuvering.¹⁶ Posing as a philanthropist, Leopold got the European powers to recognize his claim to the territory at the Berlin Conference in 1885. The powers hoped to forestall conflict among themselves by assigning the Congo to this relatively weak monarch, who pledged to keep his country, unlike other colonies, open to free trade. By 1889 Leopold had exhausted his personal fortune in the preliminary tasks of establishing a military presence in the Congo, exploring its terrain, and defining its borders. He needed new sources of revenue and could no longer tolerate competition from private traders. In 1890 at the Brussels Conference the powers gave Leopold the right to set import and transit duties. The king claimed he needed the duty income to suppress Arab slave traders, but the

principal effect of the new taxes was to put private merchants at a disadvantage in their competition with tariff-exempt state agents illegally involved in trade. On 30 October 1892 Leopold moved decisively against the merchants, including Belgians, by restricting them to a small area on the Kasai River. In order to exploit the country, Leopold now set up concession companies and instituted a labor tax of forty hours per month. This tax, brutally levied by his army, the Force Publique, turned the country into a vast slave plantation. For the next sixteen years Leopold, having neither the capital nor the inclination, did little to develop the productivity of the Congo. Instead he used his cruel and wasteful system of forced labor to extract the most easily accessible sources of wealth: ivory, copal, and wild rubber. These resources were nearly exhausted when in 1906 the Berlin powers, prompted by humanitarian reformers, decided to act against Leopold. In 1908 the Belgian parliament finally took over his private country. During Leopold's murderous rule, the population of the Congo had fallen by three million. His regime, as Conrad put it in his essay "Geography and Some Explorers," had been "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience."¹⁷

The several casebooks on *Heart of Darkness* have all included sections on Congolese history, but none has made clear how the history is connected with the story. The connection is not obvious because Conrad nowhere mentions either Leopold or the state apparatus. Instead he restricts himself to the "Company." This company would have been the one that hired Conrad as a steamer captain in 1890, the Belgian Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo (SAB).¹⁸ In the story the company expresses attitudes appropriate to the state (for example, it pretends to be philanthropic and it is hostile to free trade). Although Leopold eventually eliminated the SAB in 1892, along with all other private concerns, Conrad's conflation of the state and the SAB seems legitimate because in 1890 a substantial link still existed between the two. In February 1890 the British *Board of Trade Journal* commented, "While the Belgian Joint Stock Company of the Congo is not officially connected with the Government of the Congo Free State, it is unquestionably

greatly favored by them, and will prove a formidable rival to any commercial company operating in the valley of the Congo."¹⁹

Heart of Darkness is full of details suggesting the particular inefficiency of Leopold's rule. In the past, critics have seen these details as indicating the absurdity of imperialism in general or even the meaninglessness of the universe. In *Poets of Reality* J. Hillis Miller mentions "the disorder of the first station" and "the Eldorado expedition" as examples "of the absurdity of the imperialist invasion."²⁰ David Daiches says the "objectless blasting" and similar details are "cunningly built up into an overpowering picture of utter lack of any discernible meaning."²¹ Perhaps Conrad intended his brilliant pictures of waste to have such wide suggestiveness, but we can now see how they reveal an inefficiency that was peculiar to King Leopold's Congo. The two best examples are the building of the railway and the inadequacy of the currency system.

When Marlow arrives at the first station of his company, he finds a boiler wallowing in the grass, a railway truck lying on its back, a stack of rusty rails, and other pieces of decaying machinery. After seeing a small explosion on a nearby cliff, he comments, "They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on" (p. 16). Standing on the hillside, Marlow realizes that he will soon "become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (p. 17).

Work on the railway from this first station at Matadi up to the Central Station at Kinchassa began in March 1890, three months before Conrad arrived in the country. The 270-mile line was needed to bypass cataracts separating the lower from the upper river with its 7,000-mile system of navigable waterways. Without the railway, the vegetable products of the basin could not be profitably transported to the coast. Thus the line became the one major capital improvement that Leopold attempted during his rule. Construction, however, was hampered by his political position and his lack of resources.

In 1885 a British syndicate formed the Congo Railway Company, but Leopold, after making an initial agreement, decided he could not tolerate such a powerful foreign concern in his country. He encouraged the creation of the Bel-

gian Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo in 1889. This company, like the SAB, was headed by the financier Albert Thys, who appears in *Heart of Darkness* when he interviews Marlow in Brussels (p. 10). Thys estimated that the line could be built in four years for twenty-five million francs.²²

This estimate proved overly optimistic. In May and June 1890, George Washington Williams, a black American journalist, inspected the route and wrote a critical report for Collis P. Huntington, the Southern Pacific magnate who had invested fifty thousand dollars in the venture.²³ Williams' testimony is valuable because, along with Conrad, he is one of the very few nonofficial sources of information on the Congo in this period. While Williams thought the railway "ought to be built," he concluded that the "estimates for the construction of such a road in such a country as the Congo must have been made with precipitous haste, and based upon insufficient data." He thought construction would take at least eight years and would cost forty million francs.

Upon surveying the first eight kilometers of the route, Williams found that in the rocky terrain "every foot of this section is beset with difficulties." The line had to go over Palaballa Mountain, 525 meters high, because the river blocked detour to the north and the border with Portuguese Angola, only three miles away, blocked the south.²⁴ This unfortunate border had been drawn along a parallel of latitude by negotiators sitting in Berlin five years earlier. Since Leopold lacked the political leverage to get it changed, the railway required plenty of "objectless blasting."

Williams also criticized the transfer of cargo from ocean steamers to small-draft steamers at the government seat of Boma (a shift Marlow himself makes) before going on to Matadi: "This is an expensive and damaging system, since freight often remains exposed to the weather at Boma for weeks, there being no shelter; and the handling of it twice results in great breakage." This transshipment, made necessary because Leopold could not afford to dredge the river above Boma, accounts for the poor condition of the machinery in *Heart of Darkness*.

On the basis of Williams' report, C. P. Hunt-

ington, who was supposed to solicit aid from other American capitalists, withdrew. In 1895 he said, "It looks doubtful about the building of that road. I think more speculation in Belgium than building in the Congo is going on in that matter."²⁵ Demands for fresh capital caused repeated delays. After the four years allotted for construction of the whole line, only twenty-six miles had been covered. The Congo railway was finally completed, as Williams nicely calculated, in 1898, eight years after it had been begun, and at a cost of sixty million francs.

Another sign of Leopold's particular inefficiency in *Heart of Darkness* is the currency system. In most colonies, the government established a money economy by imposing a "hut tax" payable in cash. Analogous to enclosure in Europe, this tax compelled Africans to abandon subsistence farming and to become wage laborers. The Africans were then prompted to use their surplus earnings to buy manufactured goods; thus they developed new needs and became a market. Leopold was unusual among colonial rulers in that he had nothing to sell. He was interested not in turning the Africans into consumers but only in using their forced labor. Therefore money was not needed. The absence of a stable standard currency had the further consequence of hampering private traders by obliging them to rely on barter and a number of purely local, highly unstable currencies. In 1890 at least seven different currencies were in use in the Congo, including on part of the upper river brass wires from eighteen to fifty-two centimeters long (called *mitakos*). In 1887 the state issued its own currency, consisting of gold, silver, and copper coins, but by 1893 only three hundred thousand francs had been put in circulation and these were restricted to the lower river.²⁶

Conrad was well aware of the confused currency situation. When Marlow's steamer nears Kurtz's station at the "farthest point of navigation," the narrator describes how the crew was paid "every week three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long; and the theory was they were to buy their provisions with that currency in river-side villages. You can see how *that worked*" (pp. 41-42). Conrad here presents a picturesque detail that seems absurd but in fact shows the absence in the Congo of a

standard monetary system, a necessity for free trade and the development of a consumer population paid for its work. It is another example of Leopold's imperial inefficiency.

Conrad also judges Leopold according to the "idea" of the civilizing mission. In the Berlin Act, Leopold pledged to "improve the moral well-being" of the inhabitants of the Congo. His major violation of this trust, of course, was his imposition of forced labor. The king's apologists, such as Baron Moncheur, the Belgian minister in Washington, brazenly attempted to justify the labor tax by saying it was "a distinctly civilizing influence. It teaches the native habits of industry, and it is by habits of industry only that he can be raised to a higher plane of civilization."²⁷ But while Conrad may have affirmed the value of work, he certainly did not regard forced labor as an instrument of philanthropy.

The labor tax was not instituted until 1892, but forced labor on a smaller scale began the year Conrad was in the Congo. On 9 August 1890, a royal decree permitted the railway company to establish a militia to impress workers from the surrounding area. As the British reformer H. R. Fox Bourne noted, this militia foreshadowed the formation of Leopold's Force Publique, which would impose forced labor throughout the country (p. 125). When Marlow arrives in Matadi, he sees a chain gang of men called "criminals" carrying baskets of earth. They are supervised by a uniformed guard, probably one of the railway militia. Later, when Marlow starts up the caravan trail, he notices that the population has cleared out to avoid being caught to carry heavy loads. Marlow's reaction to the chain gang is unequivocal: he is sickened. Upon seeing a purposeless hole dug in the slope, he remarks disgustedly, "It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do" (p. 17).

In judging imperialism according to the criteria of efficiency and the "idea," Conrad could appeal to his British readers to condemn Leopold without impugning themselves, since such abuses as forced labor and the absence of currency were not characteristic of British colonies. In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad reveals two other aspects of Leopold's rule offensive to the British, not just morally but also materially. The first

involves the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, which Marlow sees pass through the Central Station. This "invasion" is based on the Katanga Expedition of 1890–93, sent to delineate the southeast boundary of the Congo. Leopold was afraid that the rich Katanga region might fall under Cecil Rhodes's northward-moving British South Africa Company, chartered in 1889. Through a treaty with the African ruler of Katanga, he managed to block the British, holding them to the area that is now Zambia. Thus Conrad's appeal may have been to jealousy as well as to virtue when he said of the expedition, "to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (p. 31).

The second revelation in *Heart of Darkness* of how Leopold acted against British interests concerns his suppression of free trade. Before Leopold set his import and transit duties in 1890, five private trading companies were operating in the Congo, including the English firm of Hatton and Cookson ("Commercial Undertakings," pp. 219–21). On 4 November 1890 the *Times* [London] complained that the new duties made the total tax on ivory twenty to fifty percent of value and therefore "prohibitive."

The largest trading company, after the Belgian SAB, was the Dutch house Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handels-Vennootschap (NAHV), which had five stations and two steamers on the upper river. As early as 1888 the chief agent of the NAHV, Antoine Greshoff, had protested state involvement in trade. The district commissioner at Stanley Pool, Charles Liebrechts, said of Greshoff, "Ce commerçant avait adopté vis-à-vis du pouvoir une politique d'hostilité personnelle."²⁸ When the Brussels Conference, on 2 July 1890, issued its declaration authorizing Leopold to impose duties, Holland refused to sign, and it held out until December, when it finally gave in under pressure from the other signatories.

Heart of Darkness reflects Leopold's move against free trade in 1890, particularly the conflict between the state and the Dutch company. The young Russian "harlequin" has been outfitted by the Dutch trader Van Shuyten, a fictional counterpart of Greshoff. The manager of

the Central Station, who describes the Russian as "a species of wandering trader—a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives," expresses the attitude of Leopold and the then favored SAB when he says, "We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example" (p. 32). Despite Leopold's promise at Berlin to preserve free trade, he saw such trade as "unfair competition," which he intended to crush.

English readers in 1899, aware of the suppression of free trade in the Congo, including that of Hatton and Cookson, would have been disturbed by the manager's treatment of the Russian. Conrad emphasizes the point when Marlow and the manager discover the Russian's copy of *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seaman-ship* and do not yet know the nationality of its owner. The manager says, "It must be this miserable trader—this intruder." When Marlow speculates that the man is probably English, the manager mutters, "It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful" (p. 39). Conrad's readers may have remembered the case of Charles Stokes, an Englishman selling guns in the Congo who was seized and summarily hanged by the Belgian officer Lothaire in 1895. Despite a formal protest from the British government, the Congo authorities acquitted Lothaire (see Ascherson, p. 243). Even without recalling Stokes, Conrad's audience could not have failed to be distressed by the manager's desire to "hang for an example" a trader he thinks might be English.

We have seen how carefully Conrad appealed to his British readers to censure Leopold's peculiar exploitation of the Congo. But although at one level *Heart of Darkness* had a polemical intent, Conrad did not think it would do much good. On 8 February 1899, after the first installment had been published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Conrad wrote his friend R. B. Cunningham Graham, who was an active anti-imperialist, "I think that if you look a little into the episodes you will find in them the right intention though I fear nothing that is practically effective."²⁹ Conrad's other letters to this friend show that the author had little faith in agitation for political reform because words were meaningless, human nature unimprovable, and the

universe dying. *Heart of Darkness* amply conveys Conrad's pessimism on all three counts, and it is this somber tone that remains most strongly with us.³⁰ Albert J. Guérard has justly called the story "one of the great dark meditations in literature, and one of the purest expressions of a melancholy temperament."³¹ Nonetheless, we should observe that *Heart of Darkness* inspired the reformers who eventually ended Leopold's rule. On 7 October 1909 E. D. Morel, head of the Congo Reform Association, wrote A. Conan Doyle, a member, that Conrad's story was the "most powerful thing ever written on the subject."³²

We may now turn to the question of whether Conrad, in addition to condemning the Congo, intended any more general criticism of imperialism, including Britain's own. If so, it is certainly not manifest. On 10 December 1902 the *Manchester Guardian*, reviewing the story just published in book form, commented, "It must not be supposed that Mr. Conrad makes attack upon colonisation, expansion, even Imperialism." Many readers, both then and now, have felt secure in drawing the same conclusion.

Throughout his works, Conrad's general attitude toward imperialism is complicated because he usually treats it case by case. His occasional statements in letters and essays show varying opinions, depending on the colony discussed and the exact issue addressed. Conrad's reaction to the Boer War in South Africa provides a good example of his complexity. He voiced his opposition in a letter to Cunningham Graham: "There is an appalling fatuity in this business. If I am to believe Kipling this is a war undertaken for the cause of democracy. *C'est à crever de rire*" (p. 126). But he altered his criticism in writing his Polish cousin Angèle Zagórska: "That they—the Boers—are struggling in good faith for their independence cannot be doubted; but it is also a fact that they have no idea of liberty, which can only be found under the English flag all over the world." Realizing that another factor was involved, he added, "This war is not so much a war against the Transvaal as a struggle against the doings of German influence. It is the Germans who have compelled the issue."³³ In a

letter to E. L. Sanderson, Conrad wished the war could have occurred someplace where it would have been more clear-cut:

We all know, we know instinctively, that the danger to the Empire is elsewhere,—that the conspiracy (to oust the Briton) of which we hear is ready to be hatched in other regions. It . . . is everlastingly skulking in the Far East. A war there or anywhere but in S. Africa would have been conclusive,—would have been worth the sacrifices.

(*Life and Letters*, 1, 285–86)

Conrad's approval of British imperialism in these letters is not absolute but relative. The people he imagines ousting the Briton are not conquered natives but other imperial rulers, notably the Germans and even the Boers (who were colonizing Africans at the same time they were fighting for independence). Compared with these other rulers, British imperialists undoubtedly seemed preferable to Conrad, but that does not mean he sanctioned them absolutely. Conrad opposed imperialism in general, of whatever type, because in conquering foreign peoples it violated their cultures. The achievement of the "modern Conquistadors," Conrad wrote Cunningham Graham in 1903, was "not as a great human force let loose, but rather like that of a gigantic and obscene beast" (*Letters to Graham*, pp. 148–49).

In assessing Conrad's position, we should remember that anti-imperialism was much less common in his time than in our own. Given the popular assumption that the peoples of Africa and Asia were "primitive" and "barbaric," it was by no means clear that imperialism was wrong. Europeans from nearly every part of the political spectrum favored it. Even Karl Marx, in his own way a proponent of Victorian ideas of progress and productivity, justified imperialism on grounds that it moved static agrarian societies toward industrialism. While recognizing the greed and cruelty of imperialism, Marx observed in 1853, "The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution."³⁴ At the turn of the century many European socialists favored imperialism. The most vociferous imperialist party in England, of

course, was the Tories under Salisbury and Chamberlain, but the Liberals under Rosebery were also loudly expansionist. The only significant, if feeble, opposition came from the Social Democratic Federation, with which Cunningham Graham was associated, and the minority wing of the Liberal party under Harcourt, Morley, and Campbell-Bannerman, which remained faithful to the noninterventionist ideology of *laissez-faire*.³⁵

The closest Conrad ever came to analyzing the global causes of late nineteenth-century imperialism was his essay "Autocracy and War," published in 1905. Here he saw both political and economic motives behind expansion. The trigger for modern imperialism was the emergence of a united Germany after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. In order to provide a sense of self-identity, Germany relied on aggrandizement, adopting "the expansion of material interests" as its "only aim, ideal, and watchword." In response, all Europe became "an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical contests for life and death and of loudly proclaimed world-wide ambitions."³⁶

Since Conrad scorned both socialism and *laissez-faire* theory, he was unable to join the anti-imperialist movements of his time. A sentence in "Autocracy and War" suggests the special nature of Conrad's feelings against imperialism: "The common guilt of the two Empires [Germany and Russia] is defined precisely by their frontier line running through the Polish provinces" (p. 95). In 1793 these two countries and Austria had partitioned Poland. While Conrad was not active in support of Polish independence until late in life, he always had strong nationalistic sentiments and hated the occupying powers. Thus we can see why Conrad's sympathy went out to the colonized natives of Africa and Asia: he himself belonged to a conquered people.

Although common today, Conrad's objection to imperialism on the grounds that it disrupted indigenous cultures was unusual in an era that failed to see the worth of those cultures. We can show that *Heart of Darkness* makes an implicit general criticism of expansion on this basis. First, however, we should show that the story's explicit criteria for judging imperialism—effi-

ciency and the "idea"—were not ultimately Conrad's own. He used these social-Darwinist values, which were proimperialist, because they were widely accepted by his audience and because they were appropriate for condemning Leopold.

On two occasions Conrad openly warned against using efficiency as a moral standard. In a letter to the *New York Times* on 24 August 1901 concerning *The Inheritors*, the novel he wrote with Ford Madox Ford about the harmful impact of imperialism on the mother countries, Conrad said, "Its form is meant to point out forcibly the materialistic exaggeration of individualism, whose unscrupulous efficiency it is the temper of the time to worship." In his 1915 essay "Poland Revisited" Conrad vehemently rejected efficiency as a justification for expansion. He derogatorily called Germany "that promised land . . . of efficiency." In relation to the rest of Europe, Germans had assumed "in grotesque vanity the attitude of Europeans amongst effete Asiatics or barbarous niggers." Just as Europeans wrongly justified imperial conquest by arguing that their material superiority conferred upon them the "white man's burden," the Germans "with a consciousness of superiority freeing their hands from all moral bonds" were "anxious to take up, if I may express myself so, the 'perfect man's burden'" (*Notes*, p. 147).

Conrad also rejected efficiency as a standard in the text of *Heart of Darkness*. And perhaps Marlow did, too. The narrator's attitude is difficult to gauge, owing to the structure of the story. He advocates efficiency in the frame story, which represents his final position chronologically, but in terms of the sequence of the text it is his first position. During the course of the main story he seems to change his view. At least in practice he subscribes to moral values more fundamental than efficiency. When Marlow first sees the company's chief accountant, he admires this "miracle" who can keep up his tidy appearance. But later Marlow's tone is bitter when he describes the accountant "making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions" (p. 20) while the sick agent lies on his truckle bed and fifty feet away Africans are dying in the "grove of death." Further on in the novel Marlow is morally appalled when the manager judges

Kurtz's plundering solely on the basis of its commercial viability. After the manager says the method is "unsound," Marlow murmurs, "No method at all" (p. 63). He decides to choose the nightmare of Kurtz, whose crimes are at least passionate, over the nightmare of men who coldly judge human actions only on grounds of their efficiency.

Conrad, and Marlow, similarly rejects the "idea" in the course of the novel. When faced with the temptation to "go native"—not merely to imitate the Africans but, like Kurtz, to exploit them—Marlow finds that no ideas of any sort can provide sufficient restraint: "Principles? Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake" (p. 37). Later he reiterates: "as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze" (p. 42). Under great temptation, a man can only rely on "his own inborn strength."

The particular "idea" of the civilizing mission not only fails to restrain exploitation but actually prompts it. Kurtz provides a striking illustration. He had gone to Africa as an apostle of civilization, a member of the "gang of virtue," but his morality disappeared when, his trade goods exhausted, he began to use a local tribe to raid the country for ivory. We might suppose that Conrad approved the original civilizing mission and objected only when it was subverted by material lust. Conrad makes clear, however, that Kurtz's immorality is not a contradiction of his morality but rather an extension of it. Marlow says of Kurtz's report, written while Kurtz was still an emissary of progress,

The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity." (p. 51)

Many critics have followed F. R. Leavis in complaining that Conrad through "an adjectival and worse than superogatory insistence on 'unspeakable rites'" never specified Kurtz's crime.³⁷ While it is true that Conrad fails to define the rites offered to Kurtz at certain midnight dances (probably human sacrifices), he quite plainly

names Kurtz's real transgression: "he had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land—I mean literally" (p. 50). Even before Kurtz began to take personal advantage of the awe inspired by his guns, "the thunder-bolts of that pitiful Jupiter" (p. 61), he had approached the Africans as a god. Both as a follower of the "idea" and as a fiend, Kurtz arrogantly regarded the natives not as fellow human beings but as worshippers.

Conrad's main underlying criticism of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* is that it destroys indigenous cultures. His portrayal of African culture in the story is admittedly less detailed than his description of Malaysia in his Eastern novels. Since he spent only six months in the Congo, as against some six years sailing to the East, we can understand his reluctance to attempt an authoritative portrait. Nonetheless, the story conveys a basic respect for African life. While Conrad does not idealize tribal culture, he still denounces the intervention that disrupted it. Since all forms of imperialism, not just Leopold's, entailed detribalization, his denunciation is presumably general.

In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow is essentially sympathetic to the Africans.³⁸ Although, using the language of his time, he calls them "niggers" and "savages," he feels that, unlike the imperialists, "they wanted no excuse for being there" (p. 14). He does not view them as noble, but he finds that, in comparison with the fiendishness of Kurtz, their "pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist—obviously—in the sunshine" (p. 59). He sees them as "prehistoric," but he recognizes "their humanity—like yours" (p. 37). Marlow is sufficiently sensitive to their culture to realize that in Africa drums might have "as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country" (p. 20). Finally, he does what he can to help them when he gives his biscuit to the man in the "grove of death" and when he blows his whistle to prevent the Africans from being shot by the "pilgrims."

Marlow feels most positive toward those Africans who have not been extensively detribalized by imperialism.³⁹ He respects the twenty cannibals on his steamer crew as "men one could work with" (p. 35), and he makes much of their innate restraint, a quality he sees as the basis of

moral behavior, in not eating the whites on board. Since these men, probably Bangalas, were enlisted "on the way" (p. 35) and are, at Kurtz's station, only eight hundred miles from home, they are not so badly displaced as the helmsman, who was trained by Marlow's predecessor and is from "some coast tribe" (p. 45). The fireman, whose training has lasted for "a few months," must also be from a different tribe since he wears "the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns" (p. 37) while the cannibals have their hair "all done up artfully in oily ringlets" (p. 41).

Marlow's attitude toward these more seriously displaced Africans is ambivalent. The proficient English captain finds his superstitious fireman comically pathetic: "to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs" (p. 37). Marlow does not, however, seem to blame these Africans for their mongrelization so much as he blames the imperialists who trained them. When he speaks sardonically of the chain-gang guard as "one of the reclaimed" (p. 16) and the fireman as "an improved specimen" (p. 37), his emphasis is on the failure and subversiveness of the civilizing mission that presumed Africans had to be redeemed. He affirms that the fireman's "training had done for that really fine chap" (p. 37).

The helmsman is a still more extreme case. Unlike the cannibals who keep their composure during the attack on the steamer, he loses his and opens the shutter to fire the Martini-Henry, an act that costs him his life. Significantly, Marlow compares him with Kurtz: "He had no restraint, no restraint—just like Kurtz—a tree swayed by the wind" (p. 52). Imperialism has displaced both of them from their restraining native societies and forced them to rely on their own uncertain impulses. The European conquerors sundered the tribes to make Africans serve alien material aims. In doing so, Conrad indicates, imperialism destroyed the cultural integrity not only of Africa but of Europe as well.

We have seen that Leopold's inefficiency and inhumanity were due not simply to greed but to a lack of resources. He was forced to use hasty methods of short-term exploitation rather than more temperate long-term means. Although

Heart of Darkness is set mostly in the Congo, an important passage near the beginning extends Conrad's criticism to include highly capitalized imperial rulers. On his way down the African coast, Marlow passes an "incomprehensible" French man-of-war "firing into a continent." We learn that "the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts," but since none of the "enemies" is in sight, the firing has "a touch of insanity" (p. 14). In a 1903 letter Conrad identified the ship: "Je me rapelle son nom: le Seignelay. C'était pendant la guerre (!) du Dahomey."⁴⁰ In February 1890 the French decided to annex Dahomey. During the next nine months they fought the indigenous Fon people. Although the Fon fielded an army of ten thousand men and two thousand women, the French, using Gatling and Maxim guns, defeated them with relative ease. In his description of the lugubrious man-of-war, Conrad, still using the criteria of efficiency and the "idea," manages to include the French in his indictment. But whereas Leopold's cruel wastefulness was due to paucity, that of the French was the result of surfeit. Just as in modern imperialist wars high-flying planes drop tons of bombs on unseen ground targets, the superior technology of the nineteenth-century powers led them to practice an impersonal overkill in their colonial conquests.

Conrad goes on to indicate the special nature of the French colonies, which were quite different from Leopold's Congo. Marlow travels in a French steamer calling "in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers" (p. 13). He specifically mentions passing "Gran' Bassam" and "Little Popo," ports in the French colonies of the Ivory Coast and Dahomey. During the 1880s France, under pressure from its manufacturers who could not compete with British products in a free market, began to impose differential tariffs in its West African territories (Hopkins, *Economic History*, pp. 160–61). Such a tariff on non-French imports was imposed, for example, in the Ivory Coast in 1889. Thus we understand why Marlow sees his steamer landing "custom-house clerks to levy toll" and soldiers "to take care of the custom-house clerks presumably" (p. 13).

Although the French, using a protectionist policy, were trying to develop their colonies as

markets and were therefore operating at a more sophisticated economic level than Leopold, who had nothing to sell, Conrad still did not approve. Marlow refers to the activity in the French ports as a "sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth" (p. 13) and a "merry dance of death and trade" (p. 14). While French commerce was comparatively more efficient and humane than Leopold's forced-labor system, Conrad still saw it as avaricious and destructive. Presumably Conrad's criticism would extend to the British, who imposed retaliatory tariffs in their colonies and joined the scramble for territory in the interior.

The closest Conrad comes to a direct indictment of the British in *Heart of Darkness* is in writing that Kurtz was "educated partly in England" and his mother was "half-English." Although Kurtz as an imperialist did not practice England's but rather Leopold's method of exploitation (raiding the country), Conrad here indicates that England itself had some responsibility for the atrocities in the Congo. Just as "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (p. 50), all Europe, including England, sanctioned the creation of Leopold's Congo at Berlin. Leopold's rule could not have come into being without the imperial rivalry of the major powers; his crimes could not have continued without their reluctance to risk their balance by intervening.

Throughout his fiction Conrad condemned imperialism of all types, both efficient and wasteful, benevolent and malevolent, British and non-British. Even his most attractive English characters, Lingard and Jim, fail to identify completely with their native communities; instead, they attempt to improve them according to their own conceptions. Their egoistic paternalism proves nearly as destructive as outright exploitation. In *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) Lingard's dream of "Arcadian happiness" for Sambir ends not only with the deaths of Almayer and Willems but with his own bankruptcy and the ascendancy of the Arabs. In *The Rescue* (1896–98, published 1920) Lingard's lingering allegiance to the Britishers on the yacht makes him unable to carry out his scheme to reinstate Hassim and Immada, a failure resulting in their deaths. In *Lord Jim* (1900) the hero's actions in Patusan

lead to the killing of Dain Waris. Jim's submission of himself to execution by Doramin may seem an act of loyalty to the community, but Conrad, stressing the young man's obsession with his own honor, terms it an act of "exalted egoism" and a "pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct."⁴¹ Unlike Avrom Fleishman, I do not find any positive "colonists" in these works. Rather I find paternalists who are condoned relative to monsters like Kurtz but who are still condemned absolutely for their domineering intervention.

Conrad's last great novel on imperialism, *Nostromo* (1904), portrays a Latin American country dominated directly in its economics, indirectly in its politics. The magnate Holroyd, from the United States, and the British financier Sir John exercise decisive influence in Sulaco through an arrangement that would now be

termed neocolonial. Conrad's condemnation of this highly capitalized and apparently benevolent imperialism, made on quite different grounds from his explicit judgment of Leopold, may be seen by comparing the cruelly inefficient building of the railway in *Heart of Darkness* with the competent, yet still disruptive, building of the railway in *Nostromo*. In the later book the general criticism of imperialism implied in the Congo story comes to the fore. Like the telegraph line and all other apparatus of imperialist intervention, the well-made new railway in Sulaco is "a slender vibrating feeler of that progress waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land."⁴²

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Notes

¹ Conrad, *Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*, ed. William Blackburn (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1958), p. 37.

² Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 4, 5. All subsequent references are to this edition, and the page numbers are given in the text.

³ Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (New York: Random, 1971), p. 151.

⁴ Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 153, n.; 143.

⁵ Hay, p. 154. Conrad used the phrase "half-shaped resolve" in reference to the African woman's resistance to the "pilgrims" who came for Kurtz. We should note that this resistance was *not* to European rule but rather to the removal of the tribe's white god.

⁶ Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 98.

⁷ Lee, *Conrad's Colonialism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 10.

⁸ Stone, "Review of *Conrad's Colonialism*," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1 (1971), 754.

⁹ Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1894), p. 327. Kidd's importance in the development of social Darwinism is discussed by Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 20-24. Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Victorian Minds* (New York: Knopf, 1968) analyzes "Varieties of Social Darwinism," pp. 314-32.

¹⁰ See William L. Langer, "A Critique of Imperial-

ism," *Foreign Affairs*, 24 (Oct. 1935), 102-15; Mark Blaug, "Economic Imperialism Revisited," *Yale Review*, 50 (Spring 1961), 335-49; Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961); D. K. Fieldhouse, "'Imperialism': An Historiographical Revision," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 14 (1961), 187-209; D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); and Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duigan, *Burden of Empire* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

¹¹ See Stokes, "Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial Expansion and the Attack on the Theory of Economic Imperialism: A Case of Mistaken Identity?" *Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), 285-301. Walter Rodney makes the same point in "The Imperialist Partition of Africa," *Monthly Review*, 21 (April 1970), 103-14.

¹² See Platt, "Economic Factors in British Policy during the 'New Imperialism,'" *Past and Present*, No. 39 (1968), pp. 120-38, and *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), pp. 249-61, 353-68.

¹³ See Hopkins, "Economic Imperialism in West Africa: Lagos, 1880-92," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 21 (Dec. 1968), 580-606, and *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 124-66.

¹⁴ See Wolff, *The Economics of Colonialism: Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974).

¹⁵ Oliver and Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966), pp. 198-99.

¹⁶ The best general histories of the Congo Free State

are Neal Ascherson, *The King Incorporated: Leopold II in the Age of Trusts* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), and Ruth Slade, *King Leopold's Congo: Aspects of the Development of Race Relations in the Congo Independent State* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962).

¹⁷ Conrad, *Last Essays*, ed. Richard Curle (London: Dent, 1926), p. 17.

¹⁸ For biographies of Conrad's year in the Congo, see Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 101–19, and Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 9–133. Sherry's wonderfully arduous research discovered the factual basis of many of the details in *Heart of Darkness* but did not attempt to put them in historical perspective.

¹⁹ "Commercial Undertakings on the Lower Congo," *Board of Trade Journal*, 8 (Feb. 1890), 221.

²⁰ Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 23–24.

²¹ Daiches, *White Man in the Tropics: Two Moral Tales* (New York: Harcourt, 1962), p. 15.

²² For a history of the railway, see H. R. Fox Bourne, *Civilisation in Congoland: A Story of International Wrong-Doing* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1903), pp. 122–24.

²³ A remarkable man, Williams was a soldier, preacher, lawyer, and historian. In 1883 he published a *History of the Negro Race in America*, the first full study. He went to Africa representing S. S. McClure's "Associated Literary Press." After investigating Matadi, he went upriver to Stanley Falls. On his way down, he would have passed Conrad coming up on the *Roi des Belges* about 6 August 1890. Williams, whose experience in the Congo turned him into the first total opponent of the regime, wrote public letters of protest to Leopold and President Benjamin Harrison. Unfortunately, his death in England in 1891 prevented him from pressing his attack.

I am grateful to John Hope Franklin of the University of Chicago for generously sharing with me his thirty years of research on Williams. His forthcoming book will fully examine the life of this neglected figure.

Williams' unpublished "A Report on the Proposed Congo Railway" is at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. My quotations are from pp. 9, 6, and 5.

²⁴ See Demetrius C. Boulger, *The Congo State; or, The Growth of Civilization in Central Africa* (London: W. Thacker and Co., 1898), p. 300.

²⁵ Interview, *San Francisco Call*, 15 Aug. 1895, p. 1.

²⁶ See "La Monnaie," *Le Congo Illustré*, 1 (1892), 34–35.

²⁷ Moncheur, "Conditions in the Congo Free State," *North American Review*, 179 (1904), 500.

²⁸ Charles Liebrechts, *Souvenirs d'Afrique, 1883–*

1889 (Brussels: J. Lebègue et Cie., 1909), p. 222.

²⁹ Conrad, *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunningham-Graham*, ed. C. T. Watts (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), p. 116.

³⁰ For a more complete discussion of Conrad's pessimism, its expression in *Heart of Darkness*, and his refusal to join the reformers in 1903, see my "Joseph Conrad and the Congo Reform Movement," *Journal of Modern Literature*, in press.

³¹ Guérard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), p. 48.

³² Quoted in Edmund Dene Morel, *History of the Congo Reform Movement*, ed. William Roger Louis and Jean Stengers (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 205, n.

³³ Conrad, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1927), I, 288.

³⁴ Marx, "The British Rule in India," *New York Daily Tribune*, 25 June 1853; rpt. in *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, ed. Shlomo Avineri (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 94.

³⁵ For a description of the opposition, see Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

³⁶ Conrad, "Autocracy and War," *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: John Grant, 1925), pp. 113, 112.

³⁷ Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), pp. 179–80.

³⁸ While Conrad employs the social Darwinist vocabulary of cultural evolution to describe Africans, we should recall that one of his favorite authors was Alfred Russel Wallace, who, although a cofounder of the theory of evolution, adopted a far more positive view of non-European peoples than did Charles Darwin. About the time of composition of *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad also became interested in Mary Kingsley, whose *Travels in West Africa* (1897) and *West African Studies* (1900) challenged evolutionary anthropology by advancing theories of polygenesis and multilinear development (see *Life and Letters*, I, 267). For a discussion of Conrad's attitude toward non-Europeans, see John E. Saveson, *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Moral* (Amsterdam: Rodopi NV, 1972).

³⁹ This point has been made by Harold R. Collins, "Kurtz, the Cannibals, and the Second-Rate Helmsman," *Western Humanities Review*, 8 (Autumn 1954), 299–310.

⁴⁰ Conrad, *Lettres françaises*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1929), p. 64.

⁴¹ Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London: John Grant, 1925), p. 416.

⁴² Conrad, *Nostromo* (London: John Grant, 1925), p. 166.